Tools, Technology and Access
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Light Work and other artist-run organizations founded during the late 1960s and early 1970s shared a vision to create new opportunities for artists who were not being served by existing institutions. Artists' spaces set a precedent by paying exhibition fees to artists, creating new educational models, and including artists in the decision-making process. Some artists' spaces identified a more basic type of support-providing access to working studio facilities for artists who had little or no access to academic, commercial, or private studio facilities.

Light Work was formed as a programming affiliate of the Community Darkrooms, a public access black and white darkroom facility at Syracuse University. The Darkrooms have fed the programs at Light Work, and working together they have reinvented the facility over and over in response to the needs of artists. In the first decade Light Work and the Community Darkrooms expanded the facility to include color printing, alternative processes, xerography, and even Kirlian photography (courtesy of David Broda). By 1985 the organization had purchased its first automated color processor and by the end of the decade had created facilities for artists working with digital imaging and multi-media. Light Work has always been a place for artists to do what they do best-create new work - and the Community Darkrooms is the facility where this activity happens.

As artists expressed interest in new methods of image-making, the organization responded by creating new opportunities for artists to experiment-developing new classes and workshops, and presenting exhibitions of experimental work. In 1975 Light Work presented an exhibition of images by local artist Carl Geiger that he created with a self-designed analog computer. In 1979 in cooperation with the Everson Museum of Art and with assistance from the Xerox Corporation, Light Work organized the exhibition *Alternative Imaging*, curated by Community Darkrooms staff member Juliana Swatko. The exhibition featured the work of 36 contemporary artists using Xerox copiers in their artwork. The exhibition also functioned as an extension of Light Work's residency program, - providing artists with access to commercial Xerox copy machines the company loaned for the exhibition (this was before the days when copy machines could fit on a desktop and were in every office). In 1981 Light Work sponsored the rubber-stamp mail art exhibition *Stamp Out Ronnie* - in commemoration of Ronald Reagan's election. The exhibition, curated by Joan Riccardi, featured the work of 10 rubber-stamp artists. By highlighting unconventional processes like electrostatic copiers and rubber stamps, Light Work became a testing ground for artists to take chances and experiment.

The desire to take chances and solve problems was, and is, one of the greatest assets artists' spaces have been able to offer artists. Pursuing this strategy in 1989 Light Work constructed a large UV light source in its studio for artist Pat Ward Williams to expose her large Cyanotype prints. Assembled from several household fluorescent light fixtures with black-light bulbs, and mounted on top of two old filing cabinets, it provided a solution for non-silver processes requiring ultraviolet exposures on those overcast Syracuse days. What it may have lacked in aesthetics and short exposure times, it made up for in simplicity. After Williams' residency it continued to serve the needs of later Artists-in-Residence including Clarissa Sligh and Pat Bacon, among others. During the 1990 residency of Maria Martinez Canas, the artist wanted to create a new series of large contact prints made from the assembled negatives she produced in Light Work's studio. The solution came from an article in *Popular Photography* which described a processing tube for mural paper made from a large PVC pipe. By rolling the exposed paper up with a layer of ordinary fiberglass window screen it could then be processed in a standard size

darkroom sink. Employing creative solutions to solve problems became one strategy to assist artists in producing their work; however, for other artists far more complex solutions would be required.

In the early 1960s when computer technology began to develop rapidly, many artists recognized the creative potential of this new tool, but found access to this technology restricted to governmental, industrial, and academic workplaces. Within the walls of a few educational and industrial research centers such as MIT, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory of the California Institute of Technology, Los Alamos National Laboratory, and Bell Telephone Laboratories, a limited number of opportunities were being created for artists interested in using technology in their work. Programs such as Bell Telephone Laboratories' Experiments in Art and Technology (1966) assisted high profile artists such as Robert Rauschenberg, Jean Tinguely, Andy Warhol, and John Cage in the creation of new work. In time, artists' spaces also responded to this new challenge and created similar opportunities for emerging artists by developing exhibitions of computerbased work, educational programs, and working facilities.

One of Light Work's first computer-based projects came from the late Jim Pomeroy in the 1988 Menschel Gallery exhibition *Stereo Views*. For the exhibition, Pomeroy created a series of stereograms using computer and traditional photographic processes, and then presented them in a series of elaborate viewing stations that he constructed in the gallery. Light Work also worked closely with Pomeroy to produce a 3-D Viewmaster Viewer of his work from the exhibition. Pomeroy's exhibition and Viewmaster project helped us appreciate the possibilities that new imaging technologies would have on the future of photography, and the need for artists to have access to these new tools.

In 1989 with a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, Light Work took its first plunge into digital imaging with the purchase of an Amiga 2000 computer system. The dark horse of the desktop computer market, Commodore's Amiga computer was embraced by artists, musicians, and video artists for its graphics, animation, sound, and multitasking capabilities, which far exceeded other comparable systems. Between 1989 and 1993 Light Work continued to build on the capabilities of the Amiga to include audio and video manipulation and multi-media development and joined other Upstate organizations such as CEPA, Hallwalls, Squeeky Wheel, Visual Studies Workshop, and the Experimental TV Studio in the growing number of artists' spaces who were providing support for artists and media producers.

Through the residency program Light Work began to identify and support artists who were already working with this technology, such as Marion Faller, Terry Gips, Mona Jimenez, Tyrone Georgiou, Keith Piper, Jim Pomeroy, and Paul Rutkovsky. Light Work converted to a Macintosh-based imaging facility in 1993 and began to invite artists to Light Work expressly to create new works in the digital lab, bringing in, among others, Martina Lopez, Carlos Gutierrez-Solana, Robert Flynt, Deborah Bright, Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie, Allyn Stewart, Patty Wallace, and Pamela Shields. Computer equipment which begins as state-of-the-art quickly becomes refuse. Light Work's initial $5,000 investment in Commodore's Amiga computer was soon replaced with a $15,000 purchase of a Macintosh imaging lab after Commodore went out of business. Less than five years after acquiring our first Macintosh, nearly every piece of equipment purchased in 1993 had been replaced with new components which were far superior and cost considerably less. By the end of the 1998 we will have invested over $75,000 in support of our current digital imaging facility, which consists of Macintosh workstations, scanners, printers, film recorder, Internet connections, and software-which is startling to us, considering that we are still using enlargers in our black and white darkroom that were installed when the facility opened in 1972.

In 1997 the Light Work Endowment Fund assisted John Pfahl in the creation of a portfolio and exhibition of twenty Iris prints from a new series entitled *Permutations on the Picturesque* in which the artist used the computer to emulate the appearance of 18th century British watercolor drawings. Light Work was able to provide Pfahl with technical support in the creation of the series and provided assistance for the digital printing

of the portfolio. In the previous year, the Light Work Endowment Fund supported a similar project by Linda Connor. The portfolio and exhibition *Visits* consisted of twenty 23 x 18" platinum prints made from Connor's original 8 x 10" negatives. The original plan to employ state-of-the-art scanners and printers to digitally create the negatives for the edition fell through, and instead Light Work turned to master printer Sal Lopes. Lopes produced the negatives and prints using methods and materials that have gone virtually unchanged since the 19th century. The Endowment Fund was established to support special projects by artists that were beyond the scope of Light Work's existing programs, and has allowed us to merge the creative talents of artists, printers, and technicians to create new methods of support for artists.

Since 1981 when Light Work bought its first office computer, none of us could have expected the role computers would have in every aspect of our job-mailing lists; databases, budgets, payroll, publication, design, etc. Light Work's permanent collection of photographs is archived on an image database which the staff uses to track images and curate exhibitions. In 1995 we launched our Internet homepage to keep people informed of our exhibition programs and publications. We didn't waste rime on feasibility studies and committee meetings. We learned the software and just did it. Through the residency program and the Community Darkrooms facility we have given artists access to new technologies without losing sight of artists still working in the realm of 'traditional' photography. As long as artists have the need to produce portfolios of exquisitely printed selenium-toned photographs, make platinum prints, or debate the advantages and disadvantages of cold light versus condenser enlargers, we will try to find a way to accommodate their needs by providing access to equipment, technical support, or just acting as a sounding board for artists to work through specific ideas.

What will the needs of artists be in the fixture? The time and money to work is obvious. The question of what type of access artists will need is more difficult to predict. We can only respond to the present, react when prompted, and listen to what artists tell us. By keeping an eye on the future without losing sight of the past, we will continue to offer programs that serve a purpose, and to provide solutions to artists, whether those solutions come from collaborations with other organizations, Silicon Valley Radio Shack, or the local hardware store.